

# Family care plan ensures Soldier readiness for duty

Sgt. Chad T. Jones

The Army continues to stay on the cutting edge of social change. Long gone are the days of the Women's Army Corps that offered very limited job opportunities for female Soldiers. Also gone are the days when women were discharged from the Army if they became pregnant.

Today's Army is a direct reflection of American society. Soldiers are marrying younger. The Army has a record number of dual-military couples – more than 20,000 couples, and an increasing number of single parents. According to the September 2003 Army Family Data Survey, the Army has more than 50,000 Soldiers on active duty that are either members of a dual-military couple with children or single parents. The survey doesn't account for National Guard and Reserve Soldiers nor does it state how many of these Soldiers have completed the mandatory packet that will provide care for their family members when they go to the field, deploy or simply have to pull a midnight shift of guard duty.

A family care plan is as essential to a Soldier's readiness as his or her field gear and weapon, according to Chief Warrant Officer Judy Weichert, a Military Personnel Technician at Forces Command, based in Atlanta, Ga.

"A family care plan is the means that Soldiers use to provide adequate and proper care for their family members when military duties prevent Soldiers from doing so themselves," said Chief Warrant Officer Judy Wiechert, a Military Personnel Technician at Forces Command.

"Family care plans must be made to ensure families are properly and adequately cared for when the Soldier is deployed, on temporary duty (TDY) or otherwise not available due to military requirements," said Sgt. Maj. Adolph George, G1 sergeant major, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division.

Army Regulation 600-20, *Army Command Policy*, Chapter 5, Paragraph 5-5 outlines which Soldiers have to have a family care plan (See Graph).

Soldiers who are married to a civilian do not need to have a family care plan, but it is highly encouraged, said Wiechert "It will be a means to provide assistance to the non-military spouse



Photo by Staff Sgt. Bradley Rhen

***Family care plans ensure families are properly and adequately cared for when the Soldier is deployed.***

in the event they are injured, become ill or incapacitated, or are otherwise unable to care for dependent family members."

Individual units and organizations are responsible for starting and maintaining an effective family care plan program, said George. He added that leadership of the first-line supervisor is critical in maintaining a sound FCP program.

First, leaders must counsel those Soldiers who fit into one of the five categories concerning their need for an FCP and also inform them of what their complete FCP packet includes.

The four main forms that make up a complete FCP packet are DA Forms 5304-R, 5305-R, 5840-R and 5841-R

DA Form 5304-R is the Family Care Plan Counseling Checklist that the commander or designated representative fills



Photo by Sgt. Chad T. Jones

***Family Care Plans are not just for temporary duty assignments and deployments, single parents and dual military couples also needed for the daily care of your family members while you are performing your daily military duties.***

out with the Soldier. DA Form 5305-R is the actual FCP that the commander must approve. DA Form 5840-R is a Certificate of Acceptance as Guardians or Escort. This is a notarized document that indicates the guardian or escort accepts responsibility to care for a Soldier's family members. DA Form 5841-R is the Power of Attorney that the Soldier uses to designate the guardian or escort.

The Family Care Plan Packet must also include a completed *DD Form 1172*, Application of Uniformed Services Identification Care for each family member, *DD Form 2558*, Authorization to Start, Stop or Change an Allotment for Active Duty or Retired Personnel, unsigned until deployment, or other proof of financial support arrangement. It should also include a letter to the guardian or escort. According to Wiechert, this letter should include pertinent information, such as location of important documents (wills, ect), health care providers, procedures to access military or civilian facilities, services, entitlements and benefits on behalf of the family members.

The counseling should also include the possible consequences a

## Who must have a family care plan?

- 1) Any pregnant soldier who has no spouse, whether because of separation, divorce, widowed or residing apart, or who is married to another servicemember.
- 2) Any Soldier who has no spouse – whether because of separation, divorce, widowed or residing apart – who has full or joint legal and physical custody of one or more family members under the age of 19 or any adult family member – regardless of age – who is incapable of self care.
- 3) Any Soldier who is divorced and has not remarried who by court decree has liberal or extended visitation rights that would allow for family members to be solely in the Soldier's care for more than 30 days at a time.
- 4) Any Soldier whose spouse is not capable of self care or is physically, mentally or emotionally disabled and requires special care or assistance.
- 5) Any Soldier married to another servicemember, a dual-military couple who have full or joint legal custody of one or more family members under the age of 19 or an adult family member – regardless of age – incapable of self care.

Soldier could face if they decide not to complete their FCP within the allotted time which is 30 days for active duty Soldiers and 60 days for Reserve Soldiers, according to George.

"Soldiers can receive a bar to reenlistment or be involuntarily separated (both enlisted and officers) for failing to have a Family Care Plan or adequately maintaining one," said Wiechert.

This punishment might seem harsh but the simple fact is Soldiers who require an FCP but choose not to fill one out are not considered eligible or available for overseas assignments or deployments "and should be considered for processing for separation from military service," said George.

The leader's second responsibility in regards to maintaining an FCP plan is ensuring their Soldier's FCPs are up to date.

According to George, FCPs need to be updated annually during the anniversary of the Soldier's birth month. This can be done by initializing and dating the original *DA Form 5305-R*. Soldiers must also renew their packets anytime something happens that could affect their FCP, such as death to a guardian, or whenever the Soldier is deployed, mobilized or processed for pre-deployment. These updates are mandatory to ensure all documents are current and legal.

Finally, leaders need to constantly remind their commanders of and emphasize the importance of a Family Care Plan.

"Bottom line up front is leaders must stay on top of this issue. It is very important and crucial and one invalid plan is too many," said George.

"A Family Care Plan helps a Soldier be available to perform military duties whenever and wherever based on the needs of the Army and be able to perform their duties without interference of family responsibilities," said Wiechert.